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LETTER DATED 8 APRIL 1998 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to convey the attached communication, dated 7 April 1998, which I have received from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would bring it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

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Annex

Letter dated 7 April 1998 from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolution 1088 (1996), I attach the fifteenth monthly report on operations of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) (see appendix). I would appreciate your making this report available to the Security Council.

(Signed) Javier SOLANA

Appendix

Fifteenth monthly report to the Security Council on the operations of the Stabilization Force

1. There are approximately 35,000 troops currently deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, with contributions from the 16 nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and from 20 non-NATO countries.

2. Over the reporting period (21 February-20 March), the Stabilization Force (SFOR) continued to conduct surveillance and reconnaissance by means of ground and air patrols. Approximately 2,400 sorties were flown by combat aircraft, with the SFOR helicopter fleet flying approximately 189 hours. SFOR troops also prepared for the conduct of Exercise Dynamic Response '98, a deployment exercise for SFOR's strategic reserve, scheduled to take place between 25 March and 7 April.

3. SFOR continued to secure the transmission towers used by Srpska Radio Television (SRT) at Duga Nijva, Udrigovo and Veliki Zep in Multinational Division North (MND(N)) and at Trebevic and Leotar in MND (South-East). On 20 March, the Republika Srpska National Assembly approved the new SRT Board of Governors, which will pave the way towards an agreement on transferring the control and security of the towers.

4. Two persons indicted for war crimes surrendered voluntarily to SFOR troops during the reporting period, the first in Bosanski Šamac on 24 February, and the second near Foca on 4 March. Both were transported to The Hague.

Cooperation and compliance by the parties

5. The parties remain generally compliant with most military aspects of the Peace Agreement across the whole area of operations.

6. During the reporting period, SFOR carried out a total of 313 inspections of military weapons storage sites: 114 Bosniac, 83 Bosnian Croat, 1 Federation and 115 Bosnian Serb. The following weapons were confiscated: from the Bosnian Croats, 1 rocket-propelled grenade launcher 22; 1 rocket-propelled missile, 1 RBM missile-57, 123 145mm rounds, 50 20mm rounds and 29 fuses; and from the Bosnian Serbs, 2 rifle grenades and 7,398 20mm rounds. In accordance with SFOR policy, the confiscated weapons will be destroyed after a period of time to allow for appeals.

7. SFOR monitored a total of 930 training and movement activities over the reporting period: 117 Bosniac, 56 Bosnian Croat, 195 Federation and 562 Bosnian Serb. A training and movement ban was placed on the Bosnian Croat Instruction Battalion in Capljina, from 7 to 21 March, because of the last-minute cancellation of several exercises and movements without notice. In addition, two bans were placed on the Bosnian Serbs: one on the 701 Brigade (Trebinje), from 14 March to 19 April, and the second on the 77th Tank Battalion (Trebinje) from 14 to 20 March, owing to deviations from authorized plans.

8. Over the reporting period, SFOR monitored 215 demining operations carried out by the entity armed forces: 111 by the Bosniacs, 80 by the Bosnian Croats

and 24 by the Bosnian Serbs. Both entities continue to demonstrate satisfactory compliance with the counter-mine campaign, and, for this reason, there are at present no bans in effect in this area.

9. SFOR has been working in close coordination with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on modalities for reconfiguring a limited number of tanks for use in demining (see S/1997/238, annex, appendix, para. 14). On 24 February, the Republika Srpska agreed to provide 12 T-55 tanks for demining. The Federation's commitment is still not confirmed.

10. As reported last month (ibid., para. 7), SFOR issued instructions to the parties requiring them to reduce combat and infrastructure sites by a further 25 per cent to approximately 400 sites. Over the reporting period, at a series of meetings aimed at preparing for these reductions, differences appeared between the SFOR list of potential sites and the one provided by the Commanders of the entity armed forces. Consequently, the SFOR Deputy Commander, Operations, decided to adjust the scheduled timeliness in order to avoid any confusion and to allow entity armed forces headquarters sufficient time properly to plan and thereafter to execute the planned requirements. The reduction period will thus now start on 1 June 1998 and should be completed by the end of February 1999.

11. The collection period under Operation Harvest, the weapons amnesty programme that was publicly launched on 11 February (ibid., para. 6), began in the first week of March. During the first two weeks of the month, the following weapons and ammunition were received: 14,556 artillery shells and 2,104 mortar shells, 65 anti-personnel mines and 20 anti-tank mines, 37 bombs, 258 grenades, 121 small arms, 29 mortars, 4,174 fuses, 56,259 small arms, 40,476 pieces of miscellaneous ammunition and 2,081 kilograms of explosives.

12. Certification by the United Nations International Police Task Force (IPTF) of the Republika Srpska police is continuing. The Republika Srpska Minister of the Interior, Mr. Stankovic, intends to reduce the force to 8,500, including the specialist police. With respect to the latter, the SFOR Deputy Commander, Operations, wrote to Mr. Stankovic outlining the outstanding issues of non-compliance by the Republika Srpska Police Anti-Terrorist Brigade and the Police Unit for the Protection of People and Buildings.

13. SFOR continues to support, on a case-by-case basis, the IPTF-led inspections of local police stations. Weapons in excess of the expected inventory are immediately confiscated and subsequently destroyed. Over the reporting period, the following weapons were confiscated: from the Federation, 15 rifles, 33 grenades, 8 rockets, 3.6 kilograms of plastic explosive, and 3,985 small arms rounds; and from the Bosnian Serbs, 7 rifles, 1 M-80 rocket launcher, 8 grenades, 1 20mm rocket and 664 small arms rounds.

14. Over the reporting period, 22 unauthorized checkpoints were dismantled.

15. Tensions remain high in Drvar, in MND (South-West), which has been identified as a priority area for minority refugee returns in 1998. Over the reporting period, Serb houses in the town were again destroyed by arson, and on one occasion the local fire department refused to act. In response, SFOR increased its surveillance of Drvar, including through helicopter overflights.

Bosnian Croat military units are occupying civilian sites in the town, including public and private housing and schools, which will be needed by returnees. On 24 February, the SFOR Commander and the High Representative wrote to senior Federation leaders setting the deadline of 15 March for Federation forces to plan their withdrawal from Drvar. In the absence of a reply, SFOR convened meetings with the Federation Ministry of Defence and with the Army Chief of Staff in an effort to resolve the situation.

16. The situation in Brcko remained calm in the aftermath of the 15 March announcement that the Arbitration Commission would postpone its final decision on the jurisdiction of the town until the end of 1998 or early 1999. SFOR continues to contribute to a secure environment by enhancing patrols in the area.

17. On 26 February 1998, at a meeting between SFOR and the Deputy Co-Chairman to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, the inter-entity boundary line adjustment agreed to on 19 August 1997 was ratified. This agreement transfers the village of Dobocani from the Republika Srpska to the Federation in exchange for the village of Koprivna.

Cooperation with international organizations

18. Within its capabilities, SFOR continues to provide assistance to the international organizations in theatre, working routinely with OSCE, the Office of the High Representative, IPTF, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

19. SFOR continues to support the installation phase of the municipal elections, principally through providing a secure environment, through supporting IPTF and through participating in the OSCE election results implementation committees at national and regional levels. On 14 March, SFOR supported the meeting of the Republika Srpska National Assembly in Banja Luka by ensuring a secure environment and freedom of movement to and from the city for all Assembly members.

20. SFOR continues to provide assistance to the Office of the High Representative in the field of civil air traffic, primarily through the development of civil air operations at Sarajevo airport. Preparations are also under way to facilitate the opening of Mostar airport to civilian traffic. In addition, on 2 March, air service was resumed between Banja Luka and Belgrade, after an absence of almost six years.

21. The Standing Committee on Military Matters postponed its scheduled meeting from 18 March to 31 March. The secretariat has prepared proposals for the first three military representatives to be sent abroad (to Washington, Brussels and Vienna). These proposals are expected to be submitted to the Standing Committee for approval at the 31 March meeting.

Outlook

22. Tensions are likely to continue in Drvar, and SFOR will continue to monitor the situation there. Enhanced SFOR patrolling will continue in Brcko.